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An Expanding Vision of Collaboration

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General Editor, *Collaborative Librarianship*

This month I am rereading for a book club I attend Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*. One chapter speaks about his trepidation at beginning a new story and how he found comfort in the fact that all he needed to do to begin was to "write one true sentence." In the field of librarianship today, I would have to say that that sentence would express the growing importance of collaboration and the fact that an ever expanding vision of collaboration comes into view.

This third issue of *Collaborative Librarianship* attempts to grasp aspects of this expanding vision. Both Steve Fisher's article on the birth of CARL in the 1970s and Martha Yee's post-print article (briefly annotated) on the cooperative cataloging services of the Library of Congress in the early 1900s highlight the strong commitment libraries historically have made to explore innovative ways of working together. Such remarkable commitment has helped pave the way for future opportunities in library collaboration.

The article by Anthony Fonseca and Van Viator deals with forms of collaboration that help academic librarians be recognized as genuine faculty members. The principles of collaboration they outline can be applied, I believe, to other forms of the profession concerned with proper recognition. Innovative collaboration is key. More broadly, however, a groundswell of greater and more radical library collaboration continues to roll across the landscape. Robert Kieft describes what now is taking place collaboratively and inter-consortially in rethinking storage and access issues related to huge collections of low-use older print materials. The enormous scope of this initiative likely will have a major impact on libraries of all types in the United States and perhaps elsewhere. Libraries, though, are not the only agencies within a community engaged in exciting

collaborative ventures. An interview with the founder and publisher and editor of *ICOSA: Connection and Collaboration*, a new magazine dedicated to promoting and profiling successes in community collaboration, helps librarians perceive this broader horizon.

Volume 1, number 3 also introduces a new column, "The Grey Area," by Mitchell Davis, President of BiblioLife, an organization spearheading the development of print-on-demand technology and services. Capitalizing on this new mode of publishing, Davis explores some exciting opportunities now opening for libraries and their collaborators in the business community. In her column, "Collaboration Matters," Nicole Engard expands a discussion on the use of collaborative technologies for sharing knowledge and in learning from others. (To help identify the growing "column" features of the journal, they now will be published in a new section of the journal entitled "Viewpoint.")

Another new feature of the journal, certain reader responses to articles and opinions expressed in the journal will be published when response demands it. In this issue, a letter from Jane Kinney Meyers, President of the Lubuto Library Project, Inc., responds to Emy Nelson Decker's article on the "Hegemony of the West," and Decker offers a brief response. We welcome your response to the journal's articles as well, and they will be considered for publication.

As you delve into this and future issues of *Collaborative Librarianship*, please keep up to date on new and exciting developments in the field by checking regularly the CL News blog; it's updated several times a week. Should you have news items about collaboration to report, please contact one of our News editors, Valerie Horton (VHor-

ton@clicweb.org) or Joe Kraus (joseph.kraus@du.edu).

Library collaboration, to be sure, has an extensive and honorable history. In step with what is happening collaboratively in other sectors of our communities, library collaboration today unfolds at an accelerated rate across the profession. For Hemingway, Paris was his "moveable feast"; for librarians, it could be truly stated, "collaboration is our 'moveable feast.'"

Readers Response

June, 2009. Jane Kinney Meyers' comment on references to the Lubuto Library Project in "Hegemony of the West and the Librarian's Role in the Struggle against HIV / AIDS in Africa."

[<http://www.collaborativelibrarianship.org/index.php/jocl/article/view/12>]

[Editorial note: Jane Kinney Meyers is Board Chairman and President, Lubuto Library Project, Inc. More information about the project can be found at <http://www.lubuto.org>]

Since Emy Nelson Decker referred to practices of the Lubuto Library Project, apparently based solely on a casual 'member profile' published a couple of years ago in the Special Library Association's magazine, I would like to give a brief response to several errors the author gleaned from that piece and unfortunately perpetuates by using it as the only source referenced in this discussion. For those wishing to learn more about the Lubuto Library Project from a professional perspective, I would recommend more recent articles by Professor Denise Agosto ("The Lubuto Library Project as a model of school library media services for disadvantaged youth," *Knowledge Quest: Journal of the American Association of School Librarians*, Chicago: American Library Association, v. 37, no. 1, p. 38-42, September/October 2008; and "The Lubuto Library Project and the universality of public

library services for youth," *Public Libraries*, Chicago: Public Library Association (a division of the American Library Association), v. 47, no. 6, p. 56-60, November/December 2008) as well as "The Lubuto Library Project: Creating Excellent and Sustainable Libraries for Vulnerable African Children and Youth," *Focus on International Library and Information Work*, published by the CILIP International Library and Information Group, v. 40, no. 1, pp. 4-8.

Regarding 'classification hegemony,' of course every good library adapts its systems to the specific needs of its users – and libraries in Africa need be no exception. The completely original (and African culture accommodating) classification and access system we specially developed for Lubuto Libraries actually got its original inspiration from Zambian Professor Maurice Lundu's call for an "African approach to librarianship" in Botswana at a 1986 meeting of the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Librarians (SCECSAL). This wasn't anything that was learned from mistakes but, rather, informed by 30 years of work in and with southern African libraries – where British, not American, organization systems and training have long dominated.

Another incorrect assertion about the Lubuto Library Project is that 'cast-off' materials are what 'really got the program started.' This simply isn't true. Lubuto Libraries have had very strict quality and relevance collection development guidelines from inception. The author is referring to an earlier experience with a street children's shelter in Lusaka to which donated used books were sent and, rather than discard them, were made available to children in a converted shipping container on the premises of the shelter. That was not a library – at least, certainly not a Lubuto Library. But later observations by the shelter's staff of how those materials were used and their impact were helpful to library professionals in assessing the value of certain types of materials to that user group.

Later in the article, erroneously calling that container of the donated books “[my] ... first library project,” and then asserting that the beautiful, indigenous design for Lubuto Libraries was developed by our talented architect in Zambia ‘to overcome the local residents’ reluctance to enter the container’ is pure fabrication. Again, this misunderstanding may in part be attributed to errors in the sole article that is cited, and I hope that the author didn’t overlook the volume of contrary information in order to present a biased argument, but, rather, simply didn’t source better information for this research.

Finally, I would mainly like to take exception to Lubuto Libraries being ‘classified’ by the author in the category of “activist” library services focused on HIV/AIDS. Yes, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, on a societal level, is a major contributor to the existence in recent years of a high percentage of orphaned and vulnerable children in Zambia, the main reason our open-access libraries are especially needed because they reach out-of-school children. And certainly our libraries contain age- and culturally-appropriate health and HIV/AIDS information that is needed by the young people we serve. But, in fact, one of the most difficult biases we struggle with, hand-in-hand with Zambia’s Ministry of Education, is U.S. funding focused solely on fighting HIV/AIDS, that does not consider the far broader and richer offerings that are the right of children and youth who come to (and shape) Lubuto Libraries. The absurd and sad effect of that is perhaps best understood by the recent reaction of young children in Lusaka to nice-looking new story books that had been created for them in Zambian languages: “Can’t we read about anything else but HIV/AIDS?”

July, 2009. Response by Emy Nelson Decker to Jane Meyers’ letter:

I would like to thank Jane Kinney Meyers for her interest in my article, “Hegemony of the West and the Librarian’s Role in the

Struggle against HIV / AIDS in Africa.” It is not my intention in this article to criticize the Lubuto Library Project or Jane Meyers’ work. If it came across this way to readers, as it seems to have for Ms. Meyers, I apologize. My primary interest in “Hegemony of the West” is to discuss the effects of unexamined cultural hegemony and the ways it can complicate the librarian’s role in information management and dissemination. In my article, the Lubuto Project serves as just one example among many that I examine to investigate the subtle and pervasive ways that Western hegemonic thinking affects even the most well-intentioned efforts in countries within Africa. I maintain that cultural hegemony is at play in many efforts that western librarians spearhead in other countries and that the topic needs further consideration.